

CHAPTER VI

THE CHURCH

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has meant different things to many people, but Mormon emigrants to Utah in the period from 1847 to 1870 would probably have been unanimous in saying that an extensive organization was one of the church's chief characteristics. Organization was everywhere apparent. The great migration of Mormons from England, Scotland, Wales, Germany, Switzerland, and Scandinavia was very largely an organized movement. Thus pioneer diaries speak of companies of saints on board ship, companies crossing the plains to Utah, companies organized to settle particular valleys, companies to build roads, dig irrigation systems and mines, and raise livestock cooperatively. There were few problems which the pioneers encountered that were not met by an organized cooperative effort. In order to appreciate properly the settlement in Wasatch County we must understand the role that church organization played in pioneer life and note the problems that were overcome with its use.

One thing that the Mormon settlers learned from their church was a pattern for leadership. This often took the form of a triad in the church. Commonly, one of the triad presided. Presiding Elders, Bishops, Presiding Bishops, Stake Presidents—all were presiding officials with progressively larger jurisdictions. They were appointed by the higher church authorities and took office when sustained by the group over which they had jurisdiction. They were free to choose two counselors to serve with them, who were also sustained by the people in their organization.

The presiding elder was an official in charge of a rather unorganized district. Later when the population assumed greater proportions and the district had more

54

THE CHURCH

55



Abraham Hatch



Joseph S. Murdock

definite shape he was replaced by a bishop who headed a permanent ward organization. When sufficient wards were organized in an area they then functioned under the direction of a stake president who headed the stake comprising the independent wards.

In order to make the first settlement in what came to be Wasatch County, the pioneers readily adopted this familiar pattern. The group of settlers who had taken up land claims in Provo Valley met in the winter of 1858 and made plans for an organized settlement. William Meeks was chosen to take charge of "affairs and regulations" and in April 1859 "a company was formed and a start was made."¹

William Meeks resigned his office in the fall of 1860 and William M. Wall, who had been herding cattle in Round Valley, was called to take his place as the presiding elder. He chose as his counselors James Laird and John M. Murdock.²

By 1861 the settlement at Heber had grown so large that Brigham Young ordained Joseph S. Murdock a bishop and sent him to organize and take charge of the Heber Ward.³ Bishop Murdock chose John W. Witt and Thomas Rasband to be his counselors and Henry Hamilton to be the ward clerk. He exercised a dual office in that he presided over the Heber Ward and also served as Presiding Bishop for the whole valley.⁴ About this time the other communities became sufficiently well organized to have Presiding Elders who performed their duties under Bishop Murdock's supervision. John Harvey was appointed Presiding Elder at Center Creek in 1861. In 1862 Sidney Epperson was called to the same office

¹Crook, "History of Wasatch County," *op. cit.*, p. 4

²*Ibid.*, p. 12.

³William Lindsay, "A History of Wasatch County," *op. cit.*, p. 3.

⁴Huber, "A History of Midway Ward," *op. cit.*, p. 2.

to serve the upper settlement on Snake Creek. In 1864 David Van Wagonen began to perform the same function for the lower settlement. John Watkins, who lived in Midway, became the Presiding Elder for Charleston and traveled there to hold meetings every Sunday.

Joseph Murdock proved to be an able administrator and particularly efficient in dealing with the Indians. His kindness and generosity was respected by all. The Indians were particularly impressed because he had reared a young Indian girl and later married her.⁵

Abram Hatch replaced Joseph S. Murdock as Presiding Bishop in December of 1867. He had been sent to Provo Valley by Brigham Young, and his arrival on

⁵William Lindsay, "A History of Wasatch County," *op. cit.*, p. 8.



Stake Tabernacle

a cold, rainy December day marked the beginning of a long period of service to the people of Wasatch County.⁶ He chose Thomas Giles and Henry S. Alexander as his counselors. Midway had by this time come into being as an amalgamation of the upper and lower Snake Creek settlements and Sidney Epperson was appointed as Presiding Elder there with David Van Wagonen and Ira Jacobs as counselors. In 1870 Elder Epperson was released and replaced by Henry S. Alexander.⁷

By the summer of 1887 the increase in population warranted the establishment of a stake and the reorganization of the communities into wards. Apostles John Taylor and Franklin D. Richards came to Heber and held a conference on the fourteenth and fifteenth of July.

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷Huber, *op. cit.*, p. 2.



Ann Murdock

Margaret Muir

Mary McMullin

Bishop Hatch was then appointed as the first stake president over the new Wasatch Stake of Zion.

Abram Hatch, the son of Hezekiah and Aldura Hatch, was born January 3, 1830, in Lincoln, Vermont. When he was ten years old his father's entire family was converted to Mormonism, and in the fall of 1840 they moved to Nauvoo. Abram became a member of the Nauvoo Legion, and later in 1846, when the Mormons were forced to flee Nauvoo, he served as a captain of ferry boats across the Missouri.⁸ In 1850 he immigrated to Utah and settled in the town of Lehi. He married Permelia Jane Lott in 1852 and rapidly became known as an enterprising and industrious young man. In Lehi the young Hatch family farmed, raised stock, and ran a hotel successfully.⁹ He also began buying and freighting merchandise across the plains.

Brigham Young called him on a mission to Great Britain in 1864, and upon his return in 1867 sent him to Wasatch County. He enjoyed a reputation for industriousness, and took care to encourage others to avoid idleness. He always had a hammer and nails with him as he traveled the county roads in his buggy, and whenever he passed a fence that needed mending he stopped to fix it.¹⁰

For thirty-three years he was the head of Wasatch County. Together with his ecclesiastical duties he was probate judge for six years and a member of the Utah Territorial Legislature for twenty-three years. While in the legislature he introduced the first bills for public maintenance of common schools and woman suffrage.¹¹ Although polygamy was practiced by the Mormons during this period Abram Hatch never took a second wife.

⁸Andrew Jenson, *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia* (Salt Lake: Deseret News Press: 1901), I, 385.

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰Statement by Emma Hatch Wherritt, personal interview, 1951.

¹¹*Deseret News*, September 7, 1917.

Andrew Jenson paid him just tribute when he said that under his wise and practical management Wasatch became a prosperous and desirable locality.¹²

The presiding authorities before Hatch had been well suited to bring the people through the strenuous period of pioneer settlement and Indian difficulties. He was eminently fitted to serve the people as Presiding Bishop at the beginning of a new productive era, and the creation of Wasatch Stake was evidence of what had been accomplished under his leadership. Thomas H. Giles and Henry S. Alexander were retained as his counselors and Charles Shelton was chosen to be the stake clerk.¹³

The new stake, which included all the settlements in Provo Valley, was divided into wards at the same time. In Heber two wards were created. The east Ward with Thomas Rasband, bishop, and John Muir and Harmon Cummings, counselors, encompassed all the territory east of Main Street. Those people living west of Main Street belonged to the West Ward, where William Forman was ordained bishop with John Crook and George T. Giles, counselors.¹⁴ All the settlements on the west side of the river were incorporated into the Midway Ward, and here David Van Wagonen was made bishop and had John Watkins and Alvah J. Alexander as counselors.¹⁵ Three more wards were also organized on the east side of the river. At Charlston, N. C. Murdock was bishop with Enoch Richins and Edward Buys as counselors. Bishop Benjamin Cluff, together with his counselors, John Harvey and John Baird, presided at Center, while at Wallsburg, William E. Nuttall was bishop and J. C. Parcell and Francis Kirby served as first and second counselors respectively. Woodland or Bench Creek

¹²Jenson, *op. cit.*, p. 385.

¹³William Lindsay, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵Huber, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

at this time had a Presiding Elder, John Moon, as it was not large enough to warrant status as a ward.¹⁶

The erection of church buildings paralleled the change in church organization and the growth of the valley communities. In 1860 the people in Heber stopped work on their homes in order to build a meeting house in the center of the fort. In two weeks' time a double log cabin twenty by forty feet was finished just before the celebration of Pioneer Day on July 24. It was as much a community building as a church; and both school and social events were held under its roof, which, like all other dirt roofs, leaked so badly at times that scheduled meetings had to be postponed.¹⁷ William Lindsay tells that there were fireplaces in both ends large enough to take logs three or four feet long.¹⁸ On the west side a "set off" was built for the speakers' stand, and split log benches provided seating for those in attendance.

Church buildings became progressively better. At first logs were commonly used for building material, but soon stone replaced it for public and private building. In Midway the tithing office was housed in a building constructed of pot rocks. With the organization of the wards new buildings were constructed to care for the ward population. The Stake Tabernacle, in red sandstone, was the crowning achievement. President Hatch superintended its construction, and the cost of \$30,000 was met by donation from the members of the stake. Elisha Averett supervised the masons, Alex Fortie the carpenters, and Francis Kirby did the painting.¹⁹ This stake building served both of the Heber wards as a meeting house until 1902.

Church meetings played a large part in the lives of the Latter-day Saints from the very beginning of settle-

¹⁶William Lindsay, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

¹⁷Crook, "History of Wasatch County," *op. cit.*, p. 12.

¹⁸William Lindsay, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 13.

ment. At first, meetings were held in the homes of the settlers. The pioneers attended church on Sunday and Fast Meeting on the first Thursday in every month.²⁰ In a few years the number of meetings had greatly expanded. A typical family arose on Sunday morning in time for Sunday School at 10:00 a.m. This meeting was devoted to religious instruction in classes arranged roughly according to age groups; children were rewarded for their attendance with Sunday School tickets printed with Biblical quotations. After a number of tickets had been collected they could be turned in for a "Chromo," a highly prized picture of one of the characters from the Bible.²¹

Sacrament meetings were held on Sunday afternoon. Here the people gathered once more to partake of the Lord's Supper and listen to a sermon which could sometimes last two hours or more. The Latter-day Saints practiced baptism by immersion, and this ordinance was performed once a month in one of the nearby streams, the whole community turning out for the event.

The older children of the family could attend Mutual Improvement Association on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and Relief Society meetings offered diversion from family tasks for the hard-working pioneer mother.

In June, 1869, President Hatch organized the first Relief Society in Heber.²² Organization in the other wards soon followed. The women engaged in a wide variety of activities. In Heber, Margaret Muir, Ann Murdock, and Mary McMullin supervised the building of a new Relief Society hall and grainery in the 1870's. The hall was used for meetings, quiltings, and, at times, social events. The grainery held a wheat reserve that could be drawn upon in time of need. The Relief Society made burial clothes; and in case of death they cared for

²⁰Crook, "History of Wasatch County," *op. cit.*, p. 10.

²¹Statement by Emily Coleman, personal interview, 1952.

²²*Ibid.*

²³William Lindsay, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

the deceased, packing the body with ice while Moroni Blood finished the coffin so the funeral could be held.²⁴ Throughout the stake women were busy helping families smitten with sickness, making quilts and delivering babies, all in a spirit of good will.

On September 3, 1879, Emmeline B. Wells and Eliza R. Snow came from Salt Lake City, and under the direction of the Stake Presidency they set up the first Stake Relief Society. Emma Brown served as the first president with Sarah Alexander and Mary Daybell as counselors.²⁵

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints played a role of major significance in the pioneering venture which founded Wasatch County. The Church and its teachings motivated people to move out on this frontier. The people settled in a manner distinctly colored by the religious atmosphere. The Church made the settlement an organized venture by providing a pattern of trusted leadership and a cooperative approach to the problems of pioneering. And finally, it provided a real opportunity for individual development, for nearly everyone had some opportunity to serve in a position of leadership.

A very colorful person in the valley was Jesse Bond, one of the original pioneers who was the bell toller for all Sunday meetings and all special occasions.

He was a professional bell toller from England and knew so well how to toll for each occasion he was ringing for, especially when he tolled the bells mournfully for funerals.

²⁴Emily Coleman, interview.

²⁵William Lindsay, *op. cit.*, p. 14.